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## Appropriations Committee Hearing on Education

February 17, 2022

Testimony by Jeffrey S. Bravin, Executive Director (HB5037)

### American School for the Deaf

Good afternoon. I am here this afternoon on behalf of the students and staff at the American School for the Deaf to request your support in the restoration of ASD's Appropriation through incremental increases over the next four years.

The entire ASD community is grateful for your support that resulted in the approval of \$600,000 in deficiency funds to ASD last year. These funds were critical in allowing us to continue our operations throughout the pandemic. However, since they were one-time funds, we cannot rely on this funding as a long-term solution to fill the deficit in our Core program caused by the cuts to our Appropriation over the last ten years. ASD's state funding has been significantly impacted by line item reductions and holdbacks since 2012. Over time, these substantial funding decreases resulted in a \$3.2 million deficit in our Core Pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade academic program.

ASD's Core program welcomes students from across Connecticut. We are the **only** educational option available for **all** deaf and hard of hearing students in our State. Furthermore, ASD is the only option in Connecticut offering a **bilingual learning environment** with instruction in both American Sign Language and spoken English. We are, in effect, the Least Restrictive Environment for deaf and hard of hearing students.

ASD's Core program is experiencing **rapidly growing enrollment**. Our census has increased from 98 students to 109 so far this year. In fact, it has been difficult keeping up with the demand. Due to staffing challenges, we have delayed admissions in our pre-k program. A significant population of our students are deaf with special needs and require individualized supports and instruction. ASD offers small class sizes to allow staff to support the learning of each student, and we have several additional supports available for our students including Audiology, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Counseling, and Psychological Services.

Though ASD has creatively restructured and reprioritized our initiatives to offset cuts by the State, our deficit has grown to an unsustainable level. To continue operating our Core program, we initiated the following measures:

- reduced our staff by 20% (both through layoffs and an early retirement incentive),
- reduced our campus size through the sale of property,
- rightsized our educational facilities through the build of a more efficient building in 2013,

- froze ASD's Defined Benefit Pension Plan,
- raising tuition and fees by 20% over three years (10% increase in 2020-21, 5% in 2021-22, 5% in 2022-23),
- post 3-5 RFPs each year for major contract services to ensure costs are controlled and competitive,
- make use of a revolving line of credit,
- secured funds through the Payroll Protection Plan, and
- maintained salary levels while avoiding salary increases.

Additionally, ASD has been forced to appropriate revenue from our PACES Residential Treatment Program to support our Core program. PACES offers **unparalleled** therapeutic supports to deaf and hard of hearing children with severe behavioral and emotional challenges. **PACES is one out of ONLY two such programs in the United States.** Students enrolled in this program need significant help, and their options are frustratingly limited. Revenue from this program should be used to expand the program and support PACES students – not subsidize an essential educational program (our Core program) due to insufficient support from our State.

**Our options for the continued operation of our Core program are exhausted and we need your support in building back the losses to our Appropriation.** We respectfully request the restoration of ASD's full Appropriation through \$800,000 increases to our Appropriation each year for the next four years (totaling \$3.2 million).

These are challenging times, and we must all work together to support Connecticut's deaf and hard of hearing students. I sincerely hope you will join me in advocating for the full reinstatement of ASD's Appropriation. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey S. Bravin  
Executive Director